

BUILDING A NEW NORTHGATE LIBRARY, COMMUNITY CENTER & PARK

SITE PLANNING MEETING RECAP

7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 24, 2003

Olympic View Elementary School, 504 N.E. 95th St.

More than 90 people from the community attended this meeting to discuss proposed site plans for the new Northgate library, community center and park. The Seattle Public Library city librarian Deborah L. Jacobs started the meeting with welcoming comments and introductions of Ken Bounds, superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation; Library capital program director Alexandra Harris; Parks and Recreation director Erin Devoto; and the site planning design team of Stan Lokting, consultant with ARC Architects, and Terry Reckord, landscape architect with MacLeod Reckord. During the course of the meeting, Jacobs and Bounds also introduced Linda Larson, president of The Seattle Public Library board of trustees; Greg Maffei, Library Board member and steward for the Northgate Branch; Library Board member Eric Liu; Park Board chairman Bruce Bentley; Park Board members James Fearn Jr., Susan Golub, Sarah Neilson and Kathleen Warren; David Traylor, member of the Citizen Implementation Review Panel (CIRP), a 15-member panel that provides citizen oversight of The Seattle Public Library's Libraries for All building program, and CIRP steward for the Northgate Branch; Ellen Judson, CIRP vice chairwoman; and David Kunselman, Library capital projects manager for the Northgate project.

Lokting and Reckord reviewed the two different site plans, scheme A and scheme B, and the features of each. During the question and answer session, members of the community asked the following questions:

Q. What's the narrow slot between the plaza and the community center?

A. It is an interior hallway that provides access to some of the spaces.

Q. A surface parking lot may be a tempting place to park for mall patrons. Have designers considered this?

A. Parks and the Library have not yet hired an architect(s) to design the project, but this will be considered as we begin the building design work.

Q. Do we have the money for scheme A right now? And we do not have the money for scheme B right now?

A. We do have the money for scheme A, but do not have the money for scheme B, which would cost an estimated additional \$1.6 million.

Q. Library staff members have said they want to protect the library from noise from Fifth Avenue Northeast, but in both plans the library is on the street.

A. Like a retail store, the library needs to be visible and easy to find. It will advertise its presence by being on the street edge. The north main reading room is the most sensitive area in the library to noise. It faces away from the street and toward the park. Parks and the Library also can build wall and window sections that can block out noise.

Q. How safe will the underground parking be, and how do patrons get in and out of it?

A. Since Parks and the Library are still in the site planning phase, it's a little too early to give specifics. If the project includes structured parking, it would be designed with safety in mind and have good lighting. We are very sensitive to safety needs of the facilities in this neighborhood. The entrance would be at the existing intersection on Fifth Avenue Northeast. Patrons would go down a spiral garage entrance and come out at approximately the same place as they went in. Entrance to the community center from the parking lot would be located on the lower level and be accessible by stairs and an elevator. The library would be located across the plaza.

Q. What is the total slope differential on the site? Also, I don't see any planning for drainage management.

A. The site slopes from northwest to southeast. There is a 20-foot vertical difference and another 20 feet of

fill down to the street at 105th Street. The total difference is about 40 feet. The Library and Parks have budgeted for onsite stormwater detention and treatment, likely through an underground vault that would hold rain and slowly release it into the stormwater system. Since the site is currently all asphalt and we intend to redevelop to add a park and landscaping, any reduction in asphalt would greatly reduce the impervious surface and improve the water quality..

Q. It appears that construction will occur all the way up to the street edge without street-side parking. I would like to see more of a promenade. The trees in these plans along the edge of the street do not provide much blockage. It would be dangerous for kids if they ran after items that strayed into traffic. Also, the library seems like it should be back in the space because it needs quiet with the community center as a buffer.
A. City zoning, which has defined Northgate as an urban center, requires building placement next to the sidewalk edge. This is part of the transformation from suburban to urban development. The Library and Parks are committed to creating a pleasing streetscape for pedestrians along Fifth Avenue Northeast, including adding 12-foot-wide sidewalks, street trees, benches, landscaping and topography to act as a buffer between the park and the street. We seek to contribute to safe and inviting pedestrian connections between the park and other uses and open space in the area. We would make sure through design that park users are protected from the street. We anticipate providing a public plaza that provides a pleasant and safe connection to the improved pedestrian crossing connecting the Northgate Mall to the library and community center. The plaza also would provide a gateway to the park, which would then be linked to Park 6 and Thornton Creek. These improvements will enhance connections to residences, transit, shopping and future open space in the area. Also, these plans do not preclude curbside parking. It may be of value to put short-term parking on the street. Any street-side parking would have to extend into the site, instead of out into traffic.

Q. Would there be any possibility of reducing the cost of scheme B by parking across the street at Northgate Mall? What percentage of people will be long-term parkers versus short-term parkers?

A. In determining the number of parking spaces, we'll start with what the code requires. Then we'll document how people get to the site and what other parking is available in the area. Currently there is no street parking in the area. Parks and the Library have great concerns about pedestrians crossing Fifth Avenue Northeast to get to the branch, park and community center. Large events at the facilities may necessitate using additional parking on special occasions. We will explore all options and the site will be well-served by transit.

Q. Has the beauty of the building been considered so we don't have another tin box like Target?

A. It is still too early in the design process to think about design specifics like that; however, we are committed to providing handsome civic buildings that invite public use and enjoyment.

Q. East-west traffic is really miserable through this area. Is there an opportunity for an overpass or a traffic blocker of some kind?

A. There will be street-frontage improvements, including 12-foot-wide sidewalks, street trees, benches, landscaping and topography to act as a buffer between the park and the street, which will contribute to safe pedestrian connections. There are many ways to strengthen pedestrian uses while accommodating traffic and we will look into them.

Q. I have three concerns: 1) Drainage on the site is a problem and should be studied; 2) Safety and crime prevention are important issues and have the potential to cause problems; 3) The parking listed in these drawings does not look adequate. I recommend an increase in parking stalls. Also we'll need to prevent mall patrons from parking in the lot.

A. 1) Right now, the site drains to 105th Street to the southeast of the lot, and it goes into a concrete drainage pipe. When we redevelop the site we will add a lot more pervious surface with grass and trees. This will greatly reduce the amount of water coming off the site. The Library and Parks have studied natural elements such as exposed water elements and drainage swales. The slope of the site and the fact that it is on top of fill works against us. In addition to costing more, the swale approach also would use up valuable open space. The Library and Parks have budgeted for onsite stormwater detention and treatment, likely through an underground vault. 2) On the issue of safety, we have made the park visible from the street so it is easier to supervise. Our goal is to avoid recesses and unsafe entries. We will use landscaping to promote safety. 3) On the parking issue, we need to find a balance. We believe that 60 to 67 stalls will get us where we need to be.

Q. As far as library size, how does it compare to the Green Lake Branch? What will be the “greatest hits” at the community center?

A. The library will be 10,000 square feet, for comparison. The Green Lake Branch is currently 8,090 square feet, the Ballard Branch is 7,300 square feet, and the Lake City Branch is 9,000 square feet. The community center is planned to be 20,000 square feet. It is comparable to the new Meadowbrook Community Center. There will be a gym, arts and activities room and kitchen.

Q. On scheme B, how would parking for the handicapped be accommodated?

A. Handicapped parking would be underground and adjacent to the elevator. The elevator would go up to a plaza that would connect to the library and community center. .

Q. Budget is important, but underground parking is ideally the way we should go. We need a civic center that is more pedestrian-friendly, less automotive-friendly. How does the fact that the site is fill affect the project? We ought to use this chance to create water retention that celebrates Thornton Creek.

A. . There is approximately 20 feet of fill in addition to the grade. There are many ways of addressing this. Geo-piles, a foundation system, is the least expensive way to provide the structure for the building. We tried to keep costs down while getting the best function. Surface parking accommodates the loading and unloading for both buildings better than any other scheme we looked at. The underground parking option is more constrained. For the drainage, we did consider swales, or a different way of dealing with stormwater, but they all take up valuable open space.

Q. Where could \$1.6 million for underground parking come from?

A. Neither the Library nor Parks is able to pay the estimated \$1.6 million for underground parking. Funding for the project comes from the Community Center Levy, the Pro Parks Levy and from the “Libraries for All” bond issue. We studied the underground parking issue, even though we don’t have money for it, because it illustrates the trade-offs between parking and open space and allowed us to estimate the costs. Within available funding, Scheme A (surface parking) is what we can afford.

Q. Is there a possibility that Scheme A could be modified to provide more open space. Because the community center will have big, blank walls, what will we do to mitigate that for neighbors to the east? Is there anything else along Fifth Avenue Northeast, or just the park?

A. The community center will be located toward the southeast corner and will be partially sunken into the site. The perception to neighbors will be about a story to a story and a half visually. In addition, it might be detailed with windows. We don’t envision a fence along Fifth Avenue Northeast. We want the park to feel open and accessible. Issues of security can be dealt with in the design process. The park would be below the level of the sidewalk.

In addition, the following comments were made:

On scheme A, I was thinking you could draw a line right down the middle and flip it over to have the community center at the front. It would be better for noise and be a better buffer to have parking on the street. I oppose underground parking because of the safety and security issue. Twelve-foot sidewalks seem silly. I don’t think you need even 8 feet of sidewalk to accommodate pedestrians.

Congratulations on showing us at least one plan that stays within the budget. We need these facilities. Whatever choices we make, please keep the entire project within the budget.

I am disappointed to hear that the Parks Department’s preference is for Scheme A (surface parking). The park is too small. Do not dismiss acquiring additional funding out of hand

Jacobs discussed next steps for the project, saying the design process would begin after the architects are

selected. She mentioned there would be further opportunity for public comment, and additional public meetings in the future.

The meeting ended with a reminder to have people send comments about the branch to Library staff or e-mail the capital program office at capital.program@spl.org. People also may contact capital project manager David Kunselman at (206) 386-4096 or by e-mail at david.kunselman@spl.org. Send comments about the community center and park to Tim Motzer, Parks project manager, at (206) 684-7060. A recap of the meeting will be posted on both the Library and Parks Web sites. The meeting ended shortly after 8:30 p.m.